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PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Djamel MOKTEFI (Algeria)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 4th plenary meeting, on 19 September 1997, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-second session the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" and to allocate it to the Fifth Committee.

2. The Fifth Committee considered the item at its 15th, 16th, 18th, 20th and 42nd meetings, on 28, 29 and 31 October, 4 November and 16 December 1997. Statements and observations made in the course of the Committee's consideration of the item are reflected in the relevant summary records (A/C.5/52/SR.15, 18, 20 and 42).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Conferences (A/52/32 and Add.1 and 2);[1]

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the results of the review of entitlements carried out by subsidiary bodies that have not fully utilized their meeting entitlements, including the duration of their sessions; review of the problems and factors involved in bodies whose utilization factor was below the benchmark figure for at least three sessions (A/52/215 and Add.1);

[1] To be issued in final form as Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/52/32/Rev.1).

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on subsidiary bodies authorized to meet away from their established headquarters in accordance with section I, paragraph 4, of General Assembly resolution 40/243 (A/52/216 and Add.1);

(d) Report of the Secretary-General on control and limitation of documentation: implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/206 C (A/52/291);

(e) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "United Nations publications: enhancing cost-effectiveness in implementing legislative mandates" (A/51/946);

(f) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "United Nations publications: enhancing cost-effectiveness in implementing legislative mandates" (A/52/685);

(g) Letters dated 11 September and 6 October 1997 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/52/340 and Add.1).

II. CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTION A/C.5/52/L.13

4. At the 42nd meeting, on 16 December 1997, the representative of Singapore introduced a draft resolution entitled "Pattern of conferences" (A/C.5/52/L.13), submitted by the Chairman on the basis of informal consultations.

5. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.13 without a vote (see para. 7).

6. After the adoption of the draft resolution, statements in explanation of position were made by the representatives of Austria, Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, Uganda, Indonesia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Morocco, Mexico, Belgium, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Pakistan, Costa Rica, Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Cuba and Kuwait.

III. RECOMMENDATION OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE

7. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

The General Assembly,

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Having considered the report of the Committee on Conferences,[2]

[2] A/52/32 and Add.1-3.

Recalling its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 40/243 of 18 December 1985, 43/222 B of 21 December 1988, 47/202 A of 22 December 1992, 48/222 A of 23 December 1993, 49/221 A of 23 December 1994, 50/206 A of 23 December 1995 and 51/211 A of 18 December 1996,

Taking note with concern of the difficulties experienced by some Member States owing to the lack of conference services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States,

1. Notes with appreciation the work of the Committee on Conferences, and takes note of its report;[2]

2. Approves the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 1998-1999 as submitted by the Committee on Conferences,[3] subject to the provisions of the present resolution;

3. Authorizes the Committee on Conferences to make adjustments in the calendar of conferences and meetings for 1998 that may become necessary as a result of actions and decisions taken by the General Assembly at its fifty-second session;

4. Requests the Secretary-General to provide all the conference services required as a result of decisions taken by the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, taking into account, as necessary, the procedures established in Assembly resolutions 41/213 of 19 December 1986 and 42/211 of 21 December 1987;

5. Decides that henceforth the two holidays of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha shall be observed as official holidays of the United Nations at Headquarters, and at other duty stations where applicable, and that United Nations buildings at those locations shall be closed to the public on those days;

6. Decides also that no United Nations meetings shall be held on Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha, which occur in 1998 on 29 January and 7 April, respectively, and requests the Secretary-General to ensure strict implementation of this decision and of paragraph 5 above when preparing all future draft calendars of conferences and meetings of the United Nations;

7. Expresses concern that 32 per cent of requests were denied for interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, in view of the importance of those meetings for the smooth functioning of sessional bodies, while recognizing that meetings of Charter and mandated bodies must be serviced as a priority;

8. Urges intergovernmental bodies to spare no effort at the planning stage to take into account meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, to make provision for such meetings in their programmes of work and to notify conference services well in advance of any cancellations so that

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[3] A/52/32, annexes I-V.

unutilized conference-servicing resources may, to the extent possible, be reassigned to meetings of regional and other major groupings of States;

9. Decides to include all necessary resources in the budget for the biennium 1998-1999 to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice, and requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, through the Committee on Conferences, a report on the implementation of this decision;

10. Emphasizes the importance of providing adequate conference-servicing resources to all United Nations conference centres;

11. Welcomes the improvement, relative to 1995, in the overall utilization factor for 1996, which exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent, in particular at Geneva and Vienna;

12. Notes with concern the underutilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

13. Calls for better utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

14. Encourages all the subsidiary bodies of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, the Commission on Human Settlements and other United Nations bodies to hold their meetings at the United Nations Office at Nairobi to the extent possible;

15. Requests the Secretary-General to assist the aforementioned bodies in improving this situation and to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, through the Committee on Conferences, on the actions taken to this end;

16. Reiterates its request to the Committee on Conferences, in consultation with the organs concerned, to examine the cases where the utilization factor is lower than 80 per cent for at least three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources;

17. Reaffirms its decision that the headquarters rule shall be adhered to by all bodies;

18. Decides that waivers to the headquarters rule shall be granted solely on the basis of the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations, which the Committee on Conferences recommended for adoption by the General Assembly;

19. Invites all its subsidiary bodies that are authorized to meet away from their established headquarters to keep under review the exception to the headquarters rule in the light of the current situation of their work and to report any changes to the General Assembly through the Committee on Conferences;

B

Recalling its resolutions 47/202 B of 22 December 1992, 48/222 B of 23 December 1993, 49/221 B of 23 December 1994, 50/206 B and C of 23 December 1995 and 51/211 B of 18 December 1996,

Regretting the delayed issuance of the report of the Secretary-General on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on United Nations publications,[4]

1. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General;[5]

2. Also takes note of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on United Nations publications,[6] the positive opinion of the Committee on Conferences thereon, as well as the report of the Secretary-General thereon,[4] and decides to consider both reports at its resumed session;

3. Expresses deep concern about the decline in the quality of some reports and documents originating in the Secretariat;

4. Notes the decision of the Secretary-General that documents originating in the Secretariat should be no longer than 16 pages;

5. Emphasizes that this reduction should not adversely affect either the quality of presentation or the content of the documents;

6. Stresses once again the need for strict compliance with the existing page limits for reports of subsidiary bodies;

7. Invites all intergovernmental bodies to consider, where appropriate, the possibility of reducing the length of their reports from the desired limit of 32 pages to 20 pages over a period of time without adversely affecting either the quality of presentation or the content of the reports;

8. Decides to keep under review the length and quality of all documents;

9. Reiterates its request to United Nations bodies and to the Secretary-General to ensure respect for equal treatment of the six official languages of the United Nations;

10. Expresses deep concern about difficulties experienced by some Member States owing to the suspension of some publications in all official languages and the delay in the translation of official documents;

11. Decides, in this regard, to request the Secretary-General to provide all necessary resources to reverse this situation;

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[4] A/52/685.

[5] A/52/291.

[6] A/51/946.

12. Requests the Secretary-General to take steps to improve the quality and accuracy of meeting records in all six official languages through full reliance on sound recordings and written texts of statements as they were delivered in the original languages in the preparation and translation of those records, and to issue those records within a reasonable time-frame;

13. Also requests the Secretary-General to ensure that the summary records of the Fifth Committee, given the technical complexity of their subject matter, are prepared by experienced language staff who are thoroughly familiar with current administrative and financial developments in the Organization, and are issued within a reasonable time-frame;

14. Further requests the Secretary-General to continue to improve and accelerate the accurate translation of documents into the official languages, giving special significance to the quality of translation;

15. Stresses the need to strengthen the monitoring of contractual translations to ensure that they meet the quality requirements for United Nations documents;

16. Requests the Secretary-General to ensure that summary records are translated in all six official languages concomitantly;

17. Also requests the Secretary-General to continue his efforts, where appropriate, to introduce new technologies such as machine-assisted translation and common terminology databases;

18. Expresses deep concern that the limits to self-revision have not been kept at a level that would ensure a high quality of translation;

19. Requests the Secretary-General to reinstate the post of reviser in the six official languages;

20. Reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to ensure that documentation is available in accordance with the six-week rule for the distribution of documents simultaneously in the six official languages of the General Assembly;

21. Regrets that there continue to be delays in the submission of documents to conference services;

22. Reaffirms its decision that, if a report is issued late, the reasons for the delay should be indicated when the report is introduced;

23. Requests the Committee on Conferences to review the late issuance of documents and to suggest remedial action for consideration by the General Assembly at its fifty-third session;

24. Requests the Secretary-General to direct all departments to include, where appropriate, the following elements in reports originating in the Secretariat:

(a) A summary of the report;

(b) Consolidated conclusions, recommendations and other proposed actions;

(c) Relevant background information;

25. Decides that all documents submitted to legislative bodies for consideration and action should have conclusions and recommendations in bold print;

26. Expresses deep concern about the technical and audio quality of some conference rooms, and in this regard requests the Secretary-General to present proposals at the first part of the resumed fifty-second session of the General Assembly in order to ensure all necessary resources for the upgrading of those conference rooms, including the interpretation booths;

C

Recalling its resolutions 50/206 D of 23 December 1995, 51/211 C of 18 December 1996 and 51/211 F of 15 September 1997,

Stressing the importance of equal access to, and benefit from, the optical disk system and other new technologies in all six official languages by all Member States and the need to overcome the difficulties faced by some Member States, in particular developing countries, in acquiring the technology to access the optical disk system, as well as other available technologies,

Appreciating the actions taken by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics of the Economic and Social Council to achieve universal connectivity between the United Nations databases and those of Member States, including through their permanent missions, and the training programmes initiated to that end,

Also appreciating the efforts of the Secretary-General to incorporate new information technologies in the work of the Organization,

1. Recognizes the efforts to provide wider access to the optical disk system, while continuing to ensure the availability of hard copies for Member States, in particular for developing countries;

2. Reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to ensure that the texts of all new public documents, in all six official languages, and information materials of the United Nations are made available through the United Nations Web site daily and are accessible to Member States without delay;

3. Requests the Secretary-General to issue public information material in all official languages on the United Nations Web site as soon as possible, and to report on the implementation of this decision to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session through the Committee on Information;

4. Also requests the Secretary-General to complete the task of uploading all important older United Nations documents on the United Nations Web site in

all six official languages on a priority basis, so that these archives are also available to Member States through that medium;

5. Further requests the Secretary-General to continue work on providing access to the optical disk system in the six official languages on an equal basis;

D

Recalling its resolutions 50/206 D of 23 December 1995 and 51/211 C of 18 December 1996,

Stressing the need to provide Member States and United Nations bodies with more comprehensive and accurate information on the costs of meetings and documentation,

Noting the possible benefits of the cost-accounting system for the financial efficiency of the United Nations,

1. Requests the Secretary-General, as a matter of priority, to expedite the development of the cost-accounting system for conference services in 1998 and to extend it to other areas of the Secretariat, ensuring that the system reflects the experience of other duty stations;

2. Encourages the Secretary-General, to the extent possible, to utilize in-house resources to implement the cost-accounting system;

3. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly by 31 July 1998, through the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, on measures taken to develop further the cost-accounting system;

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Recalling its decision 38/401 of 23 September 1983 concerning the prohibition of smoking in small conference rooms and the discouragement of smoking in large conference rooms,

1. Calls on representatives of Member States to abide by decision 38/401;

2. Encourages all users of United Nations conference facilities, in order to avoid involuntary exposure to passive smoking, to refrain from smoking, in particular, in conference rooms.